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ABSTRACT

A survey of the status of language usage in Mexico begins with an overview of language distribution among the population, mono- and multilingualism, changes in patterns of usage between the 1970 and 1980 censuses, and linguistic issues related to assimilation of the Indian population and the role and philosophy of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista in the process. A matrix follows that rates four Mexican languages (Spanish, Nahuatl, Maya, and Zapotec) on: (1) their usage rating using State Department classifications; (2) increase and decrease trends by the year 2000; (3) chief of state use in addressing the populace; (4) use in armed forces, government, court, and diplomatic communications, written and oral; (5) use as a language of instruction or required language in higher education, on the secondary and elementary levels, and in adult education; (6) use in the popular press, radio and television broadcasting, and film; (7) business and professional use, written and oral; (8) use in intellectual circles; (9) the alphabet situation; (10) the status of indigenous literature; (11) use in public signs and notices; and (12) the availability of instructional materials and dictionaries in the native languages for use by English speakers. Explanatory notes give the number and population percentages using the languages, alphabets, and specific instructional materials titles. A selected bibliography is also included. (MSE)

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Language/Area Reference Center

COUNTRY STATUS REPORT:

MEXICO

September, 1984

Prepared by:

Margaret McFerren

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Center for Applied Linguistics/LARC
Country Status Reports
September, 1984
Mexico - 1, Overview

According to 1970 census figures, 97.9% of Mexico's population speaks Spanish, the sole official language. There are an additional 55 Amerindian languages* still spoken in Mexico, and speakers of these languages were estimated at 6.5% of the population in 1970, down from 20% in 1950. Scholars have found in many of Mexico's Indian municipalities a considerable decrease in monolingualism among speakers of Indian languages, a concurrent decrease in bilingualism (one indigenous language plus Spanish), and a parallel increase in Spanish monolingualism. In other municipalities, bilingualism and monolingualism in Spanish have both increased. Because the 1980 census in its entirety was not available, and because of the obvious difficulty in projecting numbers of speakers in the absence of growth rates, only three of the Indian languages are represented in the Country Status Report: Nahuatl and Maya, which had considerable numbers of native speakers in 1970, and in which the incidence of bilingualism--high in 1970--has remained relatively stable; and Zapotec, in which the incidence of bilingualism has also remained high since 1970.

Mexico is culturally a Mestizo society--the majority of Mexicans have both Indian and white blood. Linguistically, it is an overwhelmingly Spanish-speaking society. No other language is used on a national basis, which means that in the government, the armed forces, in the schools, the press, over television, radio and film, only Spanish is used.

What has been called the Indian "problem" over the years is the Mestizo dilemma of how to assimilate the Indian and create a culturally united Mexico. In 1948, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) was created to help Indian communities identify with and relate to Mestizo society in a way which would benefit both. One of the most ambitious projects, in conjunction with the Department of Indian Languages of the Ministry of Education, has been its bilingual schools, where the native student is taught to read and write in his native language first, while Spanish is taught as a second language. The native language is used in pre-school and first and second grade interactions, and as the student continues his studies, more and more of his instruction is in Spanish. The Bilingual Radio Department created by the Ministry of Education in 1972 has been an additional aid to the work of the INI. Radio programs have been prepared in Nahuatl, Maya and Zapotec for primary school students learning Spanish. While Indian languages are not official media of instruction at the university level, there are Departments of Indian languages in several regional universities where Indian languages are taught and further studied.

In majority-Indian municipalities, and where Indians are in charge of the local government, the Secretary of the municipality is bilingual. Local proceedings may be conducted in the local language(s), but communications with the regional or central government are always in Spanish. Likewise, in local and regional courts, the official language is Spanish, yet interpreters are provided to interpret testimony from the local language(s).

Through the work of the INI, the Mexican government has done a great deal to bring about cultural unity. Gradually, monolingualism in the indigenous languages is disappearing, being replaced by bilingualism in Spanish and one indigenous language. The philosophy of the INI that the Indian can learn Spanish, and to function in Mestizo society, while at the same time retaining his native language and culture, is no longer openly contested in Mexico.

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* This figure is much higher if one considers the number of languages according to the criterion of mutual intelligibility as opposed to historical and cultural criteria. Both Maya and Zapotec are considered single languages in the census, when they are actually families, comprised of many different languages.

MEXICO

Languages

Factoids	Spanish	Nahuatl	Maya	Zapotec
1. Usage rating*	1	4	4	4
2. Increase/decrease	1	3	3	3
3. Chief of State use?	1	0	0	0
4. Armed Forces/written	1	0	0	0
5. Armed Forces/oral	1	0	0	0
6. Government/written	1	0	0	0
7. Government/oral, national	1	0	0	0
8. Government/oral, local	1	3	3	3
9. Court/written	1	0	0	0
10. Court/oral	1	3	3	3
11. Diplomatic use?	1	0	0	0
12. Higher education	1	0	0	0
13. Higher ed: required?	1	0	0	0
14. Secondary education	1	0	0	0
15. Secondary: required?	1	0	0	0
16. Primary education	1	1	1	1
17. Primary: required?	1	1	1	1
18. Adult education	1	4	4	4
19. Popular press use	1	0	0	0
20. Transmission across borders?	1	0	0	0
21. Use in radio broadcasting	1	3	3	3
22. Use in TV broadcasting	1	0	0	0
23. Use in film	1	0	0	0
24. Business/professional/written	1	0	0	0
25. Business/professional/oral	1	3	3	3
26. Use in intellectual circles	1	0	0	0
27. Alphabet situation*	1	2	2	2
28. Status of literature	1	3	3	3
29. Use in signs?	1	0	0	0
30. Teaching materials*	-	0	2	0
31. Bilingual dictionaries*	-	0	2	0

Notes:

Numbers are explained on following pages

? = information unavailable within time frame of project

- = not applicable

* = footnotes on following pages

1. 1984 ESTIMATES, NUMBER OF NATIVE SPEAKERS

Language	Number of Native Speakers	Percentage of Total Population
Spanish	72,649,500	93.5%
Nahuatl	936,100	1.2%
Maya	883,879	1.1%
Zapotec	492,293	.6%

27. TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

Language	Alphabet
Spanish	Roman
Nahuatl	Roman
Maya	Roman

30. TEACHING MATERIALS FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Nahuatl	No teaching materials exist in Nahuatl for the English speaker; what exists is in Spanish.
Maya	Blair, Robert W. and Refugio Vermont-Salas. Spoken (Yucatec) Maya: Book I, II. Lessons 1-18. Prelim. ed. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Department of Anthropology, 1965-67. McQuown, Norman A. (ed). Spoken (Yucatec) Maya: Lessons 19-30. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, Department of Anthropology, n.d.

31. DICTIONARIES FOR ENGLISH SPEAKERS

Language	Texts
Maya	Barrera-Vasquez, Alfredo. Yucatec Maya Dictionary. Merida, Yucata, Mexico: The author, 1976. Laughlin, Robert M. The Great Tzotzil Dictionary of San Lorenzo Zinacantan. (Smithsonian contributions to anthropology, no. 19) Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1975.

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - a

1. Usage rating, using the State Department classifications
   1: Official language, most widely used.
   2: Official language, not most widely used.
   3: Widely used language, but not official. (Over 10% of population)
   4: Unofficial language used by significant minority (but less than 3)
   5: Unofficial language used by influential minority
      FOOTNOTE: NUMBERS OF SPEAKERS, PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL POPULATION

2. Increase/decrease trends by the year 2000
   1: Number of native speakers will increase in proportion
   2: Number of native speakers will remain proportionally constant
   3: Number of native speakers will decrease in proportion

3. Chief of State use, in addressing populace: YES (1) NO (0)

4. Armed Forces written communications
   1: Only language used in official communiques
   2: One of the languages used in official communiques
   0: Not used in official communiques

5. Armed Forces oral communications
   1: Used on all levels
   2: Used among officers only
   3: Used among multi-lingual NCO's and troops
   4: Used among monolingual troops only
   0: Not used

6. Written government communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used in official communications

7. Oral government communications/national level
   1: Official language spoken in national assembly
   2: One of the official languages spoken in national assembly
   0: Not used in government

8. Oral government communications/local level
   1: Official language in local government
   2: One of the official languages used in local government
   3: Allowed in local government proceedings, translated into official language
   0: Not used in local government

9. Court use in written communications
   1: Only language used in official communications
   2: One of the languages used in official communications
   0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - b

10. Court use in oral communications
    1: Only official language used in court
    2: One of the official languages used in court
    3: Allowed in courts, translated into official language(s)
    0: Not used in courts

11. Diplomatic use in notes to other countries: YES (1) NO (0)

12. Use in higher education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used

13. Language taught as subject in required courses in higher education:
    YES (1) NO (0)

14. Use in secondary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

15. Language taught as subject in required courses on secondary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

16. Use in primary education
    1: Official medium of instruction
    2: Unofficial medium of instruction
    0: Not used as medium of instruction

17. Language taught as subject in required courses on primary level?
    YES (1) NO (0)

18. Language use in adult education
    1: Used in oral and written technical instruction
    2: Used in oral and written life skills instruction
    3: Used in oral life skills instruction
    4: Used in literacy classes only
    0: Not used in adult informal education

19. Language use in popular press
    1: Used in publications throughout country
    2: Used in centrally-based publications with national distribution
    3: Used only in regional and local publications
    4: Used in clandestine publications only
    0: Not used

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - c

20. Language used in radio/TV transmission across national borders?
YES (1) NO (0)

21. Language use in radio broadcasting
1: Language used broadcasting thoughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national broadcasts
3: Language used in local broadcasting only
3: Language used in clandestine broadcasting only
0: Language not used in radio broadcasting

22. Language use in TV broadcasting
1: Language used in telecasting throughout country
2: Language used in centrally-based national telecasting
3: Language used regional and local telecasting only
0: Language not used in TV

23. Language use in film
1: Language used in indigenous film-making
2: Foreign-language films dubbed/subtitled into language
0: Language not used in films

24. Business/Professional use - written
1: Sole official language in business and professional communications
2: One of the official languages in business and professional communication
0: Not used

25. Business/Professional use - oral
1: Used in trade and commerce throughout country
2: Used in national trade and commerce only
3: Used only in local trade and commerce

26. Language use in intellectual circles
1: Language used in indigenous scholarly publications
2: Language used in formal scholarly discussion
0: Language not used

27. Alphabet situation
1: Established standardized alphabet exists.
2: Alphabet developed, no standardization
3: Competing alphabets exist
0: No alphabet exists
FOOTNOTE: TYPE OF ALPHABET USED

28. Status of indigenous literature
1: Established written tradition exists
2: Literature tradition emerging
3: Popular literature exists
0: No written literature exists

29. Language used in official public signs, notices: YES (1) NO (0)

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Explanation of Matrix Figures - d

30. Teaching materials for English speakers
    1: Wide range of teaching materials exists
    2: Narrow range of teaching materials exists
    0: No teaching materials exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

31. Dictionaries for English speakers
    1: Wide range of bilingual dictionaries exists
    2: Narrow range of dictionaries exists
    0: No dictionaries exist
    FOOTNOTE: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY